THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (SHRI ASHOK PRADHAN): (a) Yes, Sir. MTNL, a Navratna Public Sector Undertaking has plans for overseas ventures, the details of which are as under:

(i) MTNL has formed a joint venture company in the name of United Telecom Limited with Telecom Consultants India Limited (TCIL), Videsh Sanchar Nigam Limited (VSNL) and Nepal Ventures (P) Ltd., (NVPL—a Nepalese Company). The company is operational since 10th October, 2001 for providing WLL based basic services in Nepal.

(ii) MTNL is in the process of getting feasibility and due diligence for a second Telecom operator in Mauritius.

(iii) MTNL also plans to operate in Kenya as a Second Telecom Operator.

(iv) MTNL has joined a consortium of TCIL India, alongwith a local partner in Malawi and has bid for buying equity stake during privatisation process of Malawi Telecom Limited (MTL).

(b) MTNL has finalised interconnect agreement with Videsh Sanchar Nigam for the year 2003-2004 for International Long Distance (ILD) and National Long Distance (NLD) Services.

(c) No. of subscriber added during the year 2002-03 in MTNL are given below:—

Cellular Mobile Subscriber		Land-line Telephone	
Delhi	38,218	Delhi	90,051
Mumbai	53,152	Mumbai	31,275

Funds for expansion of telephone system

1217. SHRIMATI SHABANA AZMI:
DR. T. SUBBARAMI REDDY:

Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Planning Commission has asked the Department of Telecommunications to prepare a comprehensive paper on funds required for the expansion of telephone system in rural India and to present it before the Finance Ministry;

(b) if so, whether Department has already submitted the report to the Finance Ministry;

(c) if so, what is their reaction;

(d) by when funds would be allotted so that the implementation of the programme could start;

(e) whether the Planning Commission has set the target for providing telephones facilities to the rural India; and

(f) if so, the details of the target set?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (SHRI ASHOK PRADHAN): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) No, Sir.

(c) and (d) Do not arise in view of (b) above.

(e) and (f) Planning Commission has approved the BSNL's (Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited) Annual plan target for the provision of 8.61 lakh DELs in the rural area during the year 2003-2004.

Decline in rice stock

†1218. SHRI RAMACHANDRA KHUNTIA: Will the Minister of CONSUMER AFFAIRS, FOOD AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that rice stock with Government which was 234 lakh tonnes' in June, 2002 has declined to barely 132 lakh tonnes this year;

(b) if so, the reasons therefor; and

†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.